

1998 Session Report

44th Legislative District



February 1998

Dear Neighbor,

The 1998 legislative session is underway. We are testing the limits of a short 60-day session as we address many issues that are important to those of us in the 44th District. The good news is we are building off the successes of recent sessions, and while new challenges lie ahead, the principles of the Republican leaders in the House of Representatives remain the same:

- We will protect taxpayers and improve the way government treats its citizens
- We will continue to reshape government, making it more accountable and responsible to the public
- We will further reduce unnecessary government interference in the lives of hard-working individuals and families

Over the past three years, we have made progress in changing the way government works. We've adopted policies to get tough on violent crime, reformed our failed welfare system in order to get more people back to work, and set a new course for education by focusing on greater accountability and higher standards of learning. Since 1995 we've curbed government spending, reduced taxes by more than \$1 billion, and adopted policies that have stimulated strong sustainable economic growth.

There is more to do. Government is still too big, expensive and intrusive. This report outlines some of the emerging issues that will require the Legislature's attention this session. As always, I welcome your ideas and questions. It is an honor to be serving you once again in Olympia.

Sincerely,

Bill Thompson
State Representative



Representative **Bill Thompson**

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Representative Bill Thompson

Transportation requires long-term solution

The needs of our state's transportation system have reached a critical point. The congestion on our highways is threatening our quality of life, the safety of our citizens, and our economy. It is incumbent upon the Legislature to develop a plan for maintaining and improving our transportation infrastructure.

Over the next six years, \$3.085 billion will be generated for state highway programs. Of that, \$2.721 billion will be needed simply to preserve and maintain the safety of existing roads. That leaves only about \$60 million a year for new projects statewide, far less than is needed. **Improvements on a 14-mile stretch of State Route 522 alone are expected to cost about \$150 million.** Any efforts to improve mobility and safety on our roads will require a long-term solution.

The Republican leadership has rejected the idea of an increase in the gas tax this session. Tax increases should always be a last resort, not the first consideration. Instead, we have developed plan that provides an additional **\$2.4 billion for transportation without a gas tax increase.** Our plan would provided the same level of funding that the governor has proposed by shifting a larger portion of the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax to the transportation budget. And we can do it without raising taxes. In fact our proposal also calls for **a reduction in the MVET of \$40 per vehicle,** compared to the \$35 cut in the governor's plan.

We will also continue looking for greater efficiency from the Department of Transportation. We have already reduced DOT administrative costs by nearly \$400 million over the last three years and shifted that money to road construction. We are currently conducting a performance audit of the transportation agencies in search of other efficiencies.

Several model programs, such as the resurfacing of Interstate 405 and the construction of the DuPont interchange south of Tacoma, have shown us that we can complete projects ahead of schedule and under budget without adverse environmental impacts.

This kind of creative thinking is healthy and will help us stretch our existing revenue to improve our transportation system. But the challenge is tremendous. Projects such as State Route 522, one of our nation's deadliest highways, depend on the Legislature's resolve to develop a comprehensive, long-term transportation plan. I am committed to making it happen.

Defense of Marriage Act to be revisited

Washington citizens remain subject to the authority of the Hawaii court with regard to the laws that define marriage. While the Hawaii Supreme Court considers whether to legalize marriage between couples of the same sex, there is no Washington law prohibiting a couple of the same sex from being married there and returning to Washington to insist on legal marital status here.

I plan to reintroduce a bill that specifically defines marriage in our state's statute as a union between one man and one woman, and requires that marriages performed in other states must meet that definition to be legal in Washington state. Regardless of how you feel about same-gender marriage, I believe this is an important public policy decision that should be made by the people of this state, either through their elected officials or by a vote of the people, rather than being **imposed on us by a judge in another state.**

Creating better schools

It is unacceptable to have students advance from one grade to the next without being able to perform at their grade level. We are doing a lifetime of damage to our children by graduating them without insisting that they have the basic skills they need to succeed. If we are going to entrust our children to our school system, then we must insist on real accountability. We want to create the best school system in the world. Our children deserve it.

Accountability

If we expect more in education, we will get more. The Legislature will be working to pass a bill this session requiring schools to set goals for improving student performance. The schools will be required to show that they are effectively bringing students up to the new standards in key subject areas, including math, reading, writing, and listening.

Reading initiatives

We are glad to see that the governor has embraced the Legislature's focus on reading, aimed at teaching every student to read by the third grade. We feel strongly that reading is the key to learning in all subject areas.

Charter schools

We will also be striving for agreement on a bill that will create innovation in education and provide more choices for Washington families. Charter schools are independent public schools. They incorporate unique methods of learning, while being held to the same academic and safety standards as other public schools.

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Good government yields black ink

You may have heard that the state is expecting an \$861 million surplus. In the last three years, the Republican-led Legislature has reduced taxes by more than \$1 billion, slowed the **growth of government spending** to the **lowest level in 26 years**, held spending below the Initiative 601 limit, and rejected attempts by big spenders to amend the voter-approved spending lid. **This is good news and it is good government.**

Although \$861 million sounds like an incredible sum of money, it could be spent several times over by special interest groups. This means the Legislature will have to prioritize and maintain its spending discipline. My philosophy on this is simple: It's your money and it should be used in your best interest.

We will work to ensure that taxpayers are able to keep as much of their own money as possible. There is strong support for reducing the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) this session and/or transferring a portion of this revenue to pay for a shortfall in transportation funding. We will also keep a responsible reserve to avoid cuts in essential programs, such as education, when our economy suffers a downturn.

Rethinking wetlands and landowner rights

Current regulations aimed at protecting wetlands have created an expensive and complicated bureaucracy for landowners. I was appointed chairman of a subcommittee on wetlands this year to review existing regulations and to develop legislation to improve them. My objectives are to ensure that landowners are treated fairly by the multitude of agencies that have jurisdiction over wetlands and to provide the most effective means of protecting wetlands that serve beneficial functions.

Mitigation banking

It is not unusual for landowners to spend a great deal of time and money to mitigate the loss of wetlands with no guarantees that their efforts will be successful. In our tours throughout the state, we studied an innovative means of restoring lost wetlands called "mitigation banking," which is the subject of a bill I have introduced this session. Mitigation banking occurs when a landowner creates new, high-quality wetlands in one area, and then sells parts of it to other landowners who wish to offset the loss of wetlands on their property.

This approach accomplishes four things:

- 1) It ensures no net loss of wetlands in our communities.**
- 2) It often creates higher quality wetlands than those being replaced.**
- 3) It gives predictability to landowners who will know that their investment to create new wetlands will meet regulatory requirements at a significantly lower cost.**
- 4) It will create functioning wetlands and take the risk out of mitigation for the landowner.**

Technical assistance

When a dispute arises between a landowner and the government over wetlands delineation, the legal and technical expertise needed is often too expensive for small landowners to make their case. I don't think government and large developers should be the only ones who have access to due process. I have introduced legislation that will require state agencies to provide free technical assistance to landowners who have a dispute over a wetlands delineation. The state agency will provide non-binding technical advice without usurping local control over land-use decisions. The free third-party analysis will give every landowner the technical assistance they need to ensure that decisions affecting their property have been made correctly.

Initiative 200 merits support

It appears that supporters of Initiative 200 have gathered the necessary signatures to certify Initiative 200. This measure would prohibit discrimination based on race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin in public employment, education, and contracting.

An initiative to the Legislature can either be approved by lawmakers or, if no action is taken, passed on to the voters. A decision has not yet been made on which course of action the Legislature will take on Initiative 200.

If given the opportunity to vote, I will support the measure. I feel strongly that every individual should be judged on his or her merits, and that discrimination based on race, sex, ethnicity or national origin should not be public policy, but rather denounced wherever it exists.

I'd like to hear from you!

Answering your questions and helping you in your dealings with state government is one of my most important duties as your state representative. Please feel free to write your comments and questions in the space below and return them to my Olympia office: Rep. Bill Thompson, P.O. Box 40600, Olympia, WA 98504-0600.

I thank you in advance for taking the time to communicate with me. Please be aware that due to election reform laws, I may be prohibited from responding to you in writing, unless you have a specific question or you are asking for specific information. Still, I always welcome your calls and letters.



Constituent Comments

Please mail your comments to me at PO Box 40600, Olympia Wa, 98504-0600

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